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RURAL LIFE AND THE FAMILY.

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This paper does not pretend to be a scientific statement of all of the reactions which environing conditions may bring to bear upon the family living in the open country. So far as I am aware, this whole matter has not been worked out by anyone with any degree of fulness. I wish that some of our sociologists would take up seriously the study of the effect of typical rural life, not only upon the rural family, but upon the rural individual, and determine the relationships between the rural environment and the rural mind. I am here merely setting down some observations which are the result of considerable association with the rural people in different parts of the country, and of some attempts to study the structure and influence of various rural social institutions.

Isolation is the chief social characteristic of rural life. But, so far as isolation is a physical fact, rather than a state of mind, the word must be used in a wholly relative sense. Isolation of country life varies all the way from the occasional hamlets and villages of the closely populated irrigation districts to the genuine loneliness of the almost boundless stock ranges, with all graduations between. It is, however, the one great fact that stands out in any comparison between the social environment of a family living on the land and a family living in the town or city.

This isolation is a separateness of the farming class from other classes. Consequently, a family belonging to this separated class must be influenced by the charac-

teristics and the standards common to the class as a whole. It is also an isolation of families. A very small proportion of our American farm families live in hamlets or villages. The families of the farm are scattered; few farm houses are closely adjacent, at least from the point of view of the city man.

Of course, it is to be observed that physical contact in the city means nothing, from the family point of view. Contiguity does not necessarily breed acquaintanceship. Probably the mere fact of farm houses being twenty rods apart, or half a mile apart, is not so significant as the fact that separateness of the farming class and scattered farm homes produce a lack of social friction between individuals, between families, and between classes, that has a significant bearing on all those concerned.

What, now, are the chief influences of this isolated mode of living upon the life and characteristics of the family, considered as a unit? I list them as follows:

1. Family life of the country is tied to the industry of the country. This unquestionably makes for interest in the work of the farm. Of course it may also result in hatred of farm work. It makes drudgery easy. It makes it difficult to get away from one's work. But this much is true, nevertheless, that the farm family may be considered an industrial, as well as a social, unit, whether the influences of this condition are good or bad, or both. It probably has both good and bad effects; but, on the social side, it certainly has a significant result which may become our second point.

2. There is a coöperative unity in the farm family that is rather striking. The whole family is engaged in work that is of common interest. The whole family often "turns to" when a task is to be carried out. When the holiday comes, the whole family takes part in it. Com-

pared with the average city family, individual interests are subordinated. Each member of the family knows what is going on. Each is in touch with the head of the family, in general if not in detail. The mother's work is ever before the eyes of all the members of the family, including the boys and men. This coöperative unity must have a powerful effect upon the life of the family. Perhaps it has a tendency to give that life too much of an industrial character. There may be too much inclination to "talk shop". There may be too little opportunity for the cultivation of the heart life, or the hearth life, of the family; but there is a certain solidarity in the farm family that makes for the permanency of the institution.

3. Speaking particularly now of the youth growing up in the farm family, it can hardly be gainsaid that family life in the open country is remarkably educative. First, by reason of the fact that both the boys and girls, from even tender years, learn to participate in real tasks. They do not merely play at doing things—they *do* them. They achieve real results. They take part in the world's work. Secondly, by association with older heads in this work, by having a share in these real problems, by understanding at an early age the good or evil results that come from definite lines of action, there comes a certain maturity of mind, a certain sureness of touch, when a job is to be done, that must be a powerful means of development,—particularly in an age when the achievement of tasks is the keynote of success.

4. I believe that, on the whole, the moral standards of the farm family, as a family, are kept on a very high plane,—partly by the fact of farm interests already alluded to, and partly by the openness of life prevalent in country districts. There are in the country few hiding places for vice, and vice usually has enough modesty not

to wish to stalk abroad. I do not mean to say that the moral influences of the country are only good; but I do say that, so far as the purity of the family as an institution is concerned, the country mode of living is conducive to a very high standard.

Thus far I have named those reactions of the environments upon the rural family which seem to be, on the whole, favorable. There is something to say on the other side.

1. Probably, on the whole, mediocre standards are encouraged. If you are brought up in the Ghetto of New York, and manage to get money enough together, you can move up on Fifth Avenue, if you want to. The average farmer doesn't move, unless he moves to town, or to a new region. If low standards prevail in the community, a particular family is likely to find itself influenced by these lower standards. There is a tendency to level down, because of the law of moral gravitation, and because it takes a long time to elevate any community standard. The average country communities are illustrating some of the disadvantages, as well as some of the advantages, of democracy. In some farm communities the presence of hired laborers in the family circle has been distinctly deleterious to good social customs, if nothing else. In the country there is a tendency toward a general neighborhood life on the social side. There is a probability that aspiration, for either personal or community ideals, will get a set away from the farm, with the result that these ideals are likely to lapse in the country.

2. A great deal of farm life is of such a character that it makes it very hard for the mother of the family. Perhaps the effects of isolation are more abiding in her case than in that of any other member of the family. This is not to give currency to the popular, but I think erroneous,

notion that there is a larger proportion of insanity among farm women than among other classes; but it cannot be denied that the type of work in the farm home in many communities, and the few social opportunities, are likely to give a narrowness that must have its result on the general life of the family.

3. The health of the average individual of the country is all that could be desired, at least during the earlier years; but it is not unfair to say that the sanitary conditions, from the public point of view, are not good in the average open country. This must have considerable effect in the long run upon the health of the family, and must have a bearing upon the development of family life.

4. There is on the whole a serious lack of recreative life in the open country, and this fact unquestionably has a strong influence upon the atmosphere of the average farm home. It tends to give a certain hardness and bareness that are not proper soil for the finer fruits of life.

5. The lack of steady income of the farmer's family is a factor that has a great deal to do with the attitude of the members of the family toward life, toward expenditures, toward culture wants, and toward those classes of people that have salaries or other steady income.

It should be noted that country life develops certain traits in the individual, which, without any special regard to the question of family life, must nevertheless influence the general spirit of the family. I refer particularly to the intense individualism of the country, and the lack of the coöperative spirit. There is neighborliness in the country; there is intense democracy; there is a high sense of individual responsibility; there is initiative; but this overdevelopment of the individual results in anaemic social life, which in turn reacts powerfully upon the general life of the family.

To my mind, the advantages of the country in respect to family life far outweigh its disadvantages. This statement must of course be understood to have in mind the great mass of farm families, as compared with the great mass of urban families of somewhat similar industrial and social standards. I make no defense of many woe-begone rural communities that can be found in all sections of the country. But I do believe that on the whole the family life of the open country, whether judged with respect to its intrinsic worth, its effect on the growing children, its permanency as a social institution, or its usefulness as a factor in our national civilization, is worthy of high praise.